

Retiring chamber chief to stick around, help out

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Retiring Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce CEO Frank Strazzarino Jr. will stay on with the organization in some capacity through the fall, board Chairman Doug Wright said.

The search committee is being formed, and Wright hopes to have Strazzarino's successor in place by this summer.

But Wright anticipates Strazzarino will stay active with the chamber and take a high-profile role this fall if a quarter-cent sales tax hike is placed on the November ballot for a special election. The chamber's board in March voted to support a public safety sales tax measure.

"Frank will still be involved at a high level," Wright said. "Politics are one of his specialties."

Bruce Dean, co-founder of Black Bear Diner, will lead the search committee, Wright said. Dean is board chairman of the California Restaurant Association.

Strazzarino, 64, announced his retirement March 20 at the annual Chamberee gala at Win-River Resort & Casino.

He will turn 65 in February and has headed up the Redding chamber since 1993. He was executive director of the South San Francisco and Cupertino chambers before coming to Redding and worked in the banking industry for 10 years.

Strazzarino envisions working with his successor through the fall and would like to see his replacement on board in time for the Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce's annual board of directors retreat in October.

"It's really important the new executive meets with the board and probably equally important that I have a diminished role there (at the retreat)," Strazzarino said.

Strazzarino founded the nonprofit Redding Piano Angels, a group that finds pianos for students in need. He wants to stay in the North State and continue to build the nonprofit he established.

"I might selectively jump into issues like the church," he said. Strazzarino attempted to buy the African Methodist

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Episcopal Zion Church in Redding in 2012 to help restore the 19th century structure.

Strazzarino also might do marketing work for businesses in the area.

"I want to prepare for the next stage of my life. I am still pretty healthy. I would like to enjoy some more time with my kids and wife and maybe do a little more traveling," he said.

Strazzarino's wife, Carol, works at Pacheco School in Redding. Their son Robert, 30, lives in Chico and is founder of College Scheduler LLC, a company with 10 employees. Daughter Stephanie, 26, also lives in Chico.

Carol Strazzarino had a stroke four years ago. Though she has recovered, Frank Strazzarino said that was a wake-up call.

"It just makes you hold a little tighter and realize how fleeting life can be," he said. "I am the one with high blood pressure and high cholesterol, and she had the stroke."

Strazzarino said he will give the chamber as much input as it wants as it searches for his successor.

"I don't think I will serve on the search committee, but I will probably meet with them," Strazzarino said.

Strazzarino estimates that he will officially retire sometime in December. He will turn 65 in February.

Wright said it would be helpful if Strazzarino's successor is somebody familiar with the North State but he did not rule out hiring from outside the area.

“A lot of folks not from our region would have a different perspective and bring some different ideas,” Wright said. “Personally, I always welcome new ideas.”

One thing Wright wants the new person to do is build up the chamber's membership, which has plunged to 875 since the middle of last decade. Somebody who is technologically savvy would be a plus, Wright said.

Wright said it's not the economy affecting membership. The chamber needs to do a better job of selling itself to businesses.

“The response I get (when I am out in the community) is what's in it for me, instead of I need to be a member because if I'm not, I am missing out,” Wright said. “I think what we need to do is we have to regenerate our base.”

chamber from 1A

- **Caption:** Frank Strazzarino Jr.
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